

Dear SOMHELP members,

This week's subject is Probiotics. Some of you may ask, "pro-by-whats?" In 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined Probiotics as, "Live microorganisms that confer a health benefit to the host when administered in adequate amounts." The live microorganisms are, in a word, bacteria. Some of the functions they perform include helping us digest our food, forming a barrier between what we eat and what goes into our blood, keeping things moving at exactly the right speed (not too fast and not too slow), and keeping our immune system healthy.

Scientists have speculated that since our intake of probiotics is much lower now than in ancient times, it may contribute to increasing inflammatory and allergic disorders in our society. Some of the therapeutic benefits that may be associated with probiotics include alleviating allergic diseases, improving therapeutic outcomes for bacterial vaginosis, improving symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), decreasing the incidence of cavities and the incidence of sickness in the workplace or daycare settings.

So what should you look for in the store? To be frank, no one is quite sure yet. They know that there are beneficial effects, but scientists are still working on what kind of bacteria, and what dose of the bacteria is beneficial. To add to this complex issue, one kind of bacteria may be good for alleviating the symptoms of one disorder but not another. There are also no guidelines for companies about what they can claim on their label – so be careful what you believe.

Eating yogurt is always a good bet. You may want to experiment with several different brands, to see which one works the best for you (see the link below for information on targeting your choice). Buy from a company you trust, and read the labels. The minimum therapeutic amount is currently considered to be 1 billion organisms per serving – but not all products will list this. Also keep in mind that probiotics are usually destroyed in cooking, microwaving or slow freezing, so any products that are created this way (like ice cream and cereal) may have a dubious effect, at best. You also may want to consider supplements...but contact your doctor if you have any reservations; if the pill you are considering contains *Bacillus*, *Clostridium*, *Enterococcus*, or *E. coli*; or if you have a weakened immune system or are severely ill.

The information in this e-mail is based on the article, "Happy Entrails: A Close Look at Digestive Health Claims" from Today's Dietitian. The full article can be viewed at: <http://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/tdmay2008pg28.shtml>. For a list of probiotics and some of their uses, visit <http://www.usprobiotics.org/products.asp>, scroll to the bottom, and click on "Probiotic Products with Targeted Health Benefits Available in the United States." This is a very clear and concise summary of potential benefits matched with products.

Information contained in the SOMHELP e-mails is general in nature, and not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. As always, you should consult with your healthcare provider before making any changes.

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